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ABSTRACT

This document describes how the faculty workload at the 16 selected SUNY (State University of New York) campuses compares with that of other public colleges and universities, and the actions SUNY has taken to ensure optimal teaching workloads. The results indicate that the teaching productivity in most of the 16 SUNY schools compared favorably with the teaching productivity of other public colleges and universities. Using national study data on faculty teaching workload, it was found that SUNY faculty had a 5% higher workload than their peers. However, the student/faculty ratios within the academic teaching more classes with fewer students. As a result of this finding, 56 academic programs at different SUNY campuses will be eliminated due to low enrollment, cost, or lack of need, saving $2.7 million over 3 years. In addition, two campuses have established formal policies governing teaching workloads. The New York State Comptroller recommends that such efforts be extended to all SUNY campuses with a focus on long-range plans. Appendices include report contributors and SUNY officials' responses to the audit. (YKH)

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State of New York
Office of the State Comptroller

Division of Management Audit and
State Financial Services

Report 96-S-55

Dr. John W. Ryan
Chancellor
State University of New York
State University Plaza
Albany, NY 12246

Dear Dr. Ryan:

The following is our report on teaching workload at the State University of New York.

This audit was performed pursuant to the State Comptroller's authority as set forth in Section 1, Article V of the State Constitution and Section 8, Article 2 of the State Finance Law. Major contributors to this report are listed in Appendix A.

Office of the State Comptroller
Division of Management Audit
and State Financial Services

April 22, 1998

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Executive Summary

State University Of New York Teaching Workload

Scope of Audit

The State University of New York (SUNY) includes four university centers, 13 arts and sciences colleges, six agricultural and technical colleges, four specialized colleges, five statutory colleges, and two independent health science centers. For the 1995-96 academic year, SUNY had an enrollment of about 150,000 full-time equivalent students who were taught by more than 10,000 full-time equivalent faculty. The annual personal service cost for this faculty workforce is about $500 million, not including fringe benefits. In December 1995, the SUNY Board of Trustees published *Rethinking SUNY* which was a broad outline of policies to be pursued to help make SUNY more cost-efficient in general.

Our audit addressed the following questions about the teaching workload at SUNY's four university centers and 12 of the 13 four-year arts and sciences colleges during the period January 1, 1995 through March 31, 1997:

- How does the teaching workload at the 16 selected SUNY campuses compare to the teaching workload at other public colleges and universities?

- Have actions taken by SUNY System Administration and selected campuses adequately ensured that the most effective teaching workloads are attained?

Audit Observations and Conclusions

We found that in most, but not all respects, the teaching productivity of the 16 SUNY schools compares favorably to the teaching productivity of other public colleges and universities. We also found that a number of appropriate actions have been taken by SUNY System Administration and campuses to address the teaching workload of faculty. However, further actions can be taken to ensure additional efficiencies are realized.

To compare the average teaching workload at the 16 SUNY schools to the average teaching workloads at public colleges and universities in other states, we analyzed the results of two national studies of faculty teaching workloads. Using results from one study we found that SUNY faculty teach more classes than their peers, but these classes have fewer students. Using results from the other study, we conclude that the

teaching workload of SUNY's faculty exceeds the teaching workload of their peers by 5 percent. However, the student/faculty ratios within the academic departments of some SUNY schools were less than the national averages. (See pp. 3-5)

In *Rethinking SUNY*, the Board of Trustees encourages SUNY faculty and staff to explore ways of improving teaching productivity. We spoke with officials at SUNY System Administration and five campuses to determine the extent to which such actions have been taken. We found that a number of such actions have been taken. For example, 56 academic programs at a number of different campuses are scheduled to be eliminated because the programs either have low enrollments, are costly to administer, or unnecessarily duplicate other academic programs in the SUNY system. The elimination of these programs will result in estimated savings of $2.7 million over three years. (See p. 6)

In addition, two of the five campuses we visited (Binghamton and Oneonta) have established formal policies governing teaching workloads. We found that the teaching workloads at these two campuses tended to be greater than the teaching workloads at the other three campuses we visited (Buffalo University, Buffalo College and Cortland) which did not have formal policies governing teaching workload. We recommend, as we did in our prior audit of SUNY faculty workloads (Report 90-S-89, issued April 3, 1991), that formal teaching workload requirements be established at all SUNY campuses. (See pp. 8-9)

We conclude that some SUNY campuses are more committed than others to improving their teaching productivity. We also conclude that the campuses are initiating productivity improvements primarily in response to funding cutbacks, and are not developing long-range plans for improving their teaching productivity. We recommend that the campuses be encouraged to make such long-range plans. We also recommend that successful productivity improvement efforts at individual campuses be extended to other campuses, and greater use be made of innovative teaching methods such as distance learning.

Comments of SUNY Officials

SUNY officials agree with our recommendations and indicated that actions have been or will be taken to implement them.

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Introduction

Background

The State University of New York (SUNY) includes four university centers, 13 arts and sciences colleges, six agricultural and technical colleges, four specialized colleges, five statutory colleges, and two independent health science centers. SUNY receives annually about $1.5 billion in State support. For the 1995-96 academic year, SUNY had an enrollment of about 150,000 full-time equivalent students who were taught by more than 10,000 full-time equivalent faculty. The annual personal service cost for the faculty workforce is about $500 million, not including fringe benefits.

In the 1980s and the 1990s, college costs nationwide increased at a faster rate than the increase in the general cost of living. Although the increase in college costs has been greater at private institutions, the increase in costs at public institutions has outpaced the inflation rate as well. In light of the increased cost of higher education, colleges have been called upon to increase their productivity. In response, a number of states, including Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Hawaii, Maryland, Mississippi, Ohio, South Carolina and Wisconsin, have initiated faculty workload studies at their state colleges and universities. Florida, Mississippi and South Carolina have even mandated minimum faculty teaching workloads for their state colleges.

In December 1995, the SUNY Board of Trustees published *Rethinking SUNY* which was a broad outline of policies to be pursued to make SUNY more cost-effective in general. This report proposed a number of initiatives, including those related to teaching productivity. The Board concluded that SUNY can achieve efficiencies in instructional delivery while preserving affordable education for SUNY students.

Audit Scope, Objectives and Methodology

We audited teaching workloads at SUNY's four university centers and 12 of the 13 four-year arts and sciences colleges for the period January 1, 1995 through March 31, 1997. One objective of our audit was to determine how SUNY's teaching workload at these 16 SUNY campuses compares with the teaching workload at other public colleges and universities. Another objective of our audit was to assess the actions taken by SUNY to ensure that the most effective teaching workloads are attained. To accomplish our objectives, we reviewed applicable policies and standards, and interviewed appropriate management and staff at SUNY System Administration and selected campuses. In addition, we reviewed information published by authoritative sources about academic productivity, including two national studies of faculty teaching workloads.

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We verified the accuracy of and analyzed certain data generated by SUNY's Course and Section Analysis system and reviewed pertinent records at SUNY System Administration and at five selected campuses (the university centers at Binghamton and Buffalo, and the colleges at Buffalo, Cortland, and Oneonta).

We conducted our audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Such standards require that we plan and perform our audit to adequately assess those operations of SUNY which are included within our audit scope. Further, these standards require that we review SUNY's systems of internal controls and its compliance with those laws, rules and regulations that are relevant to the SUNY operations which are included in our audit scope. An audit includes examining, on a test basis, evidence supporting transactions recorded in the accounting and operating records and applying such other auditing procedures as we consider necessary in the circumstances. An audit also includes assessing the estimates, judgments, and decisions made by management. We believe that our audit provides a reasonable basis for our findings, conclusions and recommendations.

We use a risk-based approach to select activities to be audited. This approach focuses our audit efforts on those operations that have been identified through a preliminary survey as having the greatest probability for needing improvement. Consequently, by design, finite audit resources are used to identify where and how improvements can be made. Thus, little audit effort is devoted to reviewing operations that may be relatively efficient and effective. As a result, our audit reports are prepared on an "exception basis." This report, therefore, highlights those areas needing improvement and does not address activities that may be functioning properly.

Response of SUNY Officials to Audit

A draft copy of this report was provided to SUNY officials for their review and comment. Their comments here been considered in preparing this report, and are included as Appendix B.

Within 90 days after final release of this report, as required by Section 170 of the Executive Law, the Chancellor of the State University of New York shall report to the Governor, the State Comptroller, and the leaders of the Legislature and fiscal committees, advising what steps were taken to implement the recommendations contained herein, and where recommendations were not implemented, the reasons therefor.

SUNY Teaching Workloads Compared to Peers

New York State has experienced a variety of difficult fiscal and economic conditions over the past ten years, resulting in budget reductions throughout State government. For example, the State-supported portion of SUNY's core operating budget was reduced from $821 million in the 1988-89 fiscal year to $695 million in the 1996-97 fiscal year. SUNY has offset a large portion of the decrease in funding with tuition increases. In addition, the SUNY Board of Trustees produced *Rethinking SUNY* to address the issue of increased efficiencies, including improvements in the area of faculty teaching workloads.

Faculty teaching responsibilities include preparation for classes, student instruction and student evaluation. A number of measurements can be used to quantify teaching workload, including the ratio of the number of students to the number of faculty (student/faculty ratios), the total number of students each faculty member has in his or her classes (student contact hours), the number of classroom hours taught weekly (faculty contact hours), the total number of credit hours awarded for each course taught (classroom credit hours), and class size. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has issued a statement on faculty workload which states that workloads are usually described in hours per week of formal class meeting (faculty contact hours). However, the AAUP also states that some institutions measure workload in terms of student contact hours. *Rethinking SUNY* addresses teaching workload in terms of the number of courses taught, student contact hours, and class size.

We compared SUNY's teaching workload to that of its peers by using the results of two national studies that calculated average teaching workloads for faculty. The first study was completed in 1993 by the National Center for Education Statistics. For this study, faculty were selected at random throughout the nation and were requested to complete a survey questionnaire concerning their teaching workloads. The study then measured the average teaching workloads for full-time and part-time faculty at public and private institutions. We extracted from the study the national averages for faculty contact hours, classroom credit hours, and class size for full-time faculty at SUNY's peer institutions. We compared these averages to the same averages for the Fall 1994 semester for the 16 SUNY campuses covered by our audit. The following chart shows the results of the comparison.

Campuses		Peers	SUNY
Faculty Contact Hours	University Centers	6.7	6.7
	Four-Year Colleges	10.6	10.8
Classroom Credit Hours	University Centers	6.2	7.1
	Four-Year Colleges	9.4	9.9
Class Size	University Centers	39.6	33.1
	Four-Year Colleges	30.5	27.3

On average, SUNY faculty generally had as many faculty contact hours and classroom credit hours as the faculty in peer public colleges and universities elsewhere. However, SUNY faculty averaged smaller class sizes than their national counterparts. A number of factors affect class size at SUNY campuses, including declining enrollment at some campuses. Officials at some of the campuses we visited stated that there has been an increase in class size in the past several years. In addition, small class sizes can be viewed as helping to assure quality instruction.

A more recent study of faculty teaching workloads was conducted by researchers at the University of Delaware with data obtained from 176 public and private colleges and universities. The study developed average student/faculty ratios for each academic discipline. To estimate these ratios for public colleges and universities only, we adjusted the ratios developed by the study by an amount that reflects the average difference in student/faculty ratios between public and private institutions, as determined from data presented in the study. We then compared these adjusted ratios to the student/faculty ratios during the Fall 1995 semester for each academic discipline at the 16 SUNY schools covered by our audit.

We found that, overall, the teaching workload of SUNY faculty exceeded the teaching workload of their peers by about 5 percent. However, the student/faculty ratios for some disciplines at some individual SUNY schools were less than the national averages. For example, according to the study, the average student/faculty ratio in math departments at public

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colleges is about 19 to 1. In comparison, the student/faculty ratio in the math department of the College at Cortland during the Fall 1995 semester was 15.5 to 1. These smaller student/faculty ratios for SUNY correlate with the study done by the National Center for Education Statistics which showed that class sizes for the campuses covered by our audit were, on average, less than class sizes at peer institutions.

Rethinking SUNY states that SUNY faculty should be at least as productive as their national counterparts. Overall we conclude that, in certain important respects, SUNY faculty already meet that goal: they teach as many courses as their national counterparts and spend as many or more hours in the classroom. However, the size of the classes taught by SUNY faculty tend to be smaller than the size of classes taught by faculty at SUNY's national counterparts.

Response of SUNY Officials to Audit:

In responding to our report, SUNY officials point out that the limited capacity of the typical campus classroom and the lack of large lecture facilities are some of the reasons why classes at SUNY tend to be smaller than classes at peer institutions. Officials also indicate that smaller classes can enhance the quality of student learning. However, officials acknowledge that attention to class size is appropriate and consistent with the goal of increasing teaching productivity that is articulated in the *Rethinking SUNY* report.

SUNY System Administration and Selected Campus Efforts

During our audit, we spoke with officials at SUNY's System Administration and at five SUNY campuses (Binghamton, Buffalo University, Buffalo College, Cortland, and Oneonta) to evaluate efforts to address teaching workloads. We identified a number of initiatives that have been begun by both SUNY System Administration and the campuses. The following sections of this report detail our observations.

SUNY System Administration Efforts

Rethinking SUNY suggested that low-enrolled programs, high-cost programs, and unnecessarily duplicative programs be eliminated. Each of these suggestions has a direct implication on the measurement of SUNY's overall teaching workload. SUNY System Administration's Office of the Provost recently conducted a review of graduate and undergraduate (excluding doctoral) academic programs that campuses were asked to examine for possible elimination based on a set of criteria which included high cost, low enrollment and the fact that similar programs exist at other SUNY campuses. A total of 137 programs were identified that met the criteria for possible elimination. SUNY System Administration forwarded the list of these programs to the appropriate campuses. SUNY officials advised us that the campuses have eliminated 56 programs (43 on the list from SUNY System Administration and 13 identified by the campuses). Some of the campuses, such as Buffalo University, did not agree to eliminate any of the listed programs and did not identify other programs for elimination. A total of $1.1 million in savings was identified in the first year, and a total of $2.7 million was identified over a three-year period. A similar review is underway for doctoral programs.

SUNY System Administration has also been involved in a number of other initiatives with teaching workload implications. For example, the SUNY Technology Plan includes new approaches such as distance learning in which students at one campus can participate in classes at other campuses through video facilities. According to the Technology Plan, each campus will have one or more classrooms equipped for distance learning. In addition, in the SUNY Learning Network, which began in the Fall of 1995, classrooms are not needed, as students can use personal computers and modems to take courses on-line. SUNY System Administration is also involved in many other initiatives, some of which are still in the planning stage.

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Campus Efforts

During our visits to selected campuses we found that, to some degree, most of the campuses were utilizing distance learning and learning technologies involving computers and video equipment. For example, at Buffalo University, there are three distance learning classrooms in use in addition to a classroom with a satellite downlink and video classroom. However, at some of the campuses, these distance learning facilities are far from receiving full utilization, as only a few courses were being taught through distance learning. We also learned of experiments by individual faculty at some of the campuses in exploring the use of the Internet and other technologies. However, we generally found no coordinated campus effort to develop these technologies.

We found that generally campuses have been or will be initiating actions to adjust faculty teaching workloads. However, we identified differences in the extent to which actions have been taken at the various campuses, as some campuses have been more aggressive than others. We also found that these efforts continue to be viewed negatively by many faculty and administrators. We further found that the efforts have primarily been in response to funding cutbacks and that the SUNY system could benefit from additional active, long-term managing for teaching productivity.

The AAUP, in a statement on faculty workload, states that no single formula for an equitable faculty workload can be devised for all of American higher education. However, the AAUP states that faculty workload is usually described in hours per week of formal class meetings (faculty contact hours). For undergraduate instruction, the AAUP has recommended a maximum teaching workload of twelve faculty contact hours (four courses) per week with no unusual expectations in such areas as research, administration, or other institutional responsibilities. AAUP also recommends a preferred teaching workload for undergraduate instruction of nine hours per week.

In our prior audit report of faculty workloads at SUNY (Report 90-S-89, issued April 3, 1991), we found that a large percentage of faculty had fewer than nine faculty contact hours a week and an even larger percentage had fewer than twelve contact hours a week. We recommended that each campus develop a formal courseload policy. The following chart compares SUNY's faculty workload in the Fall of 1995 with the workload in the Fall of 1988.

Year	Under 9 Hours	9 to Less Than 12 Hours	12 or More Hours
1995	21%	27%	52%
1988	22%	21%	57%

As the chart illustrates, many SUNY faculty still teach fewer than 12 faculty contact hours a week. Of the five campuses we visited, only two campuses (Binghamton and Oneonta) have established a formal courseload policy. Binghamton and Oneonta require that faculty teach twelve hours per week. Officials at the other three campuses we visited (Buffalo University, Buffalo College, and Cortland) told us that the issue of courseload is determined at the department level. We found that, for the most part, the departments at these campuses have teaching workloads of three to four courses. However, some departments have lower courseload requirements. For example, the Philosophy and Religion Department at Buffalo College has an informal policy of three three-credit hour classes per semester, and the English Department and the Theatre and Dance Department at Buffalo University have a policy of two courses per semester. Officials informed us that most of the faculty in these three departments actually teach three or four courses per semester. The workload during the Fall 1995 semester at the five campuses visited is shown in the following chart.

Campus	Under 9 hours	9 to Less Than 12 hours	12 or More Hours
Buffalo College	12%	32%	56%
Cortland	18%	50%	32%
Oneonta	6%	35%	59%
Binghamton	29%	23%	48%
Buffalo University	39%	20%	41%

We note that the faculty teaching workload at the University Center at Binghamton, which has a formal courseload policy, tends to be greater than the faculty workload at the University Center at Buffalo, which does not have a formal courseload policy. We also note that the faculty workload at Oneonta, which has a formal courseload policy, tends to be

greater than the faculty workload at the other two arts and sciences colleges (Buffalo College and Cortland), which do not have a formal courseload policy.

According to Cortland's administrators, the college may be obligated to observe "past practice" as to the number of courses that faculty are expected to teach in certain instances. For many of Cortland's departments, faculty are teaching only three courses per semester. According to Cortland's administrators, changes to this informal workload practice would have to be discussed or negotiated with the faculty union. However, such negotiations or discussions have not been attempted. Cortland administrators informed us that they are currently reviewing their faculty utilization policy.

Oneonta once had a similar requirement for faculty to teach only three courses per semester. However, during the 1970s, Oneonta administrators instituted a policy that revised the workload expectations for all newly hired faculty, increasing the teaching requirement from three to four courses per semester. Today the majority of Oneonta's faculty are obligated to teach four courses per semester.

The AAUP, in its statement on workload policy, states that the size of a class should be considered in evaluating faculty workload. As described previously in this report, SUNY faculty tend to teach smaller classes than their peers. SUNY campuses that we visited have not developed plans with the express purpose of increasing class size. However, following are some of the actions taken by the campuses we visited that could result in larger class sizes.

- In 1996, Cortland conducted an internal study and determined that some academic departments had to give up faculty positions and some academic departments had to be combined with other academic departments.

- In 1996, Oneonta required that certain departments achieve a student/faculty ratio of 25 to 1, which exceeded the overall college ratio of 21 to 1. The college also developed workload criteria addressing the total number of students taught by faculty and the number of students in each class.

- One of the major initiatives at Buffalo College is to identify new ways to increase student enrollment. The College introduced on-the-spot admissions and, through this program, was reportedly able to gain an additional 763 freshmen during the period January 2, 1997 through January 16, 1997.

- A number of faculty at Binghamton informed us that the class sizes at the university are increasing. The campus relies on individual school deans to monitor class size.

Recommendations

1. Continue to work with campuses to seek agreement on the elimination of programs that meet the criteria of high cost, low enrollment and unnecessary duplication among campuses.

2. Continue with plans for using such innovations as distance learning and the SUNY Learning Network to achieve desired efficiencies. Foster the utilization of these techniques, as appropriate, throughout SUNY.

3. Encourage campuses to adopt faculty courseload requirements and class size standards as part of formal campus planning to achieve desired efficiencies.

Major Contributors to This Report

Jerry Barber
Kevin McClune
Frank Houston
Marvin Loewy
Martin Chauvin
John Cooke
Michael Filippone
Gail Gorski
James Obeng
Greg Pierre
Karen Willard
Mike Wrobel

STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

DONALD G. DUNN
Executive
Vice Chancellor

System Administration
State University Plaza
Albany, NY 12246

518/443-5432
FAX: 518/443-5360

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March 23, 1998

Mr. Jerry Barber
Audit Director
Office of the State Comptroller
The State Office Building
Albany, New York 12236

Dear Mr. Barber:

In accordance with Section 170 of the Executive Law, we are enclosing the comments of SUNY System Administration regarding the draft audit report on Teaching Workload, State University of New York (96-S-55).

Sincerely,

Donald G. Dunn

Donald G. Dunn
Executive Vice Chancellor

Enc.

Appendix B

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State University of New York
Teaching Workload
96-S-55

General Comments

The University is pleased with the positive results of the State Comptroller's audit of teaching workload at the State University. At a time when the importance of faculty teaching and scholarship--and the effort that SUNY faculty bring to their work--are often subject to ill-informed criticism, it is reassuring to have an audit recognize that "...overall, the teaching workload of SUNY faculty exceeded the teaching workload of their peers by about 5 percent."

The audit finds that of the three measures it examined, SUNY exceeds national averages in faculty contact hours and credit hours. The only measure on which SUNY fell short of national counterparts was class size. There are a number of reasons why classes at SUNY tend to be smaller than classes at peer institutions, including the capacity of typical classrooms on our campuses. Unlike many other large state universities, SUNY has relatively few large lecture facilities. The physical size of our classrooms results in smaller class sizes.

The audit's attention to class size is appropriate and consistent with the goal articulated in *Rethinking SUNY* of increasing teaching productivity. Appropriately, *Rethinking SUNY* also emphasizes the quality of student learning, and campus assessment efforts reflect this priority. There are many circumstances where smaller classes are desirable from an academic perspective. In smaller classes faculty can provide more individual attention to students, the opportunity for in-depth assessment of student work by faculty is enhanced, and student access to faculty is enlarged.

The auditors clearly appreciate that teaching responsibilities are just one (albeit a critical) part of a faculty member's duties. However, since the general public frequently confuses "faculty workload" with the narrower concept of "teaching workload," we would observe that teaching is only one element in a total faculty workload which typically includes research, public service, committee service, advising responsibilities, and assisting students outside of the classroom in addition to more easily quantifiable "in-class" work. In addition, we would observe that standard measures of teaching workload do not reflect the many hours of non-classroom work involved in teaching each course, *e.g.*, course development, class preparation and student evaluation.

We do not mean to criticize the audit for what it excluded. It is difficult, if not impossible, to objectively capture any other aspects of workload than those the audit addressed. We simply wish to emphasize that because the audit properly excluded many aspects of workload, generalizations based on the results of the audit should be tempered with caution.

Recommendations

(OSC) 1. Continue to work with campuses to seek agreement on the elimination of programs that meet the criteria of high cost, low enrollment and unnecessary duplication among campuses.

(SU) 1. The University accepts this recommendation and will continue its established practice of cooperatively working with campuses to monitor programs that are unusually high in cost, have unacceptably low enrollments and are unnecessarily duplicative of existing programs. Of course, our constant pursuit of efficiency must be balanced by careful consideration of the need to ensure student access to well-balanced curricula and diverse educational opportunities.

(OSC) 2. Continue with plans for using such innovations as distance learning and the SUNY learning network to achieve desired efficiencies. Foster the utilization of these techniques, as appropriate, throughout SUNY.

(SU) 2. The University is committed to expanding its efforts in distance learning and the utilization of advanced learning technologies. We are pursuing distance learning because of the advantages it promises for service to students, increasing access and enriching instructional opportunities. Our primary goals in distance learning are the same as on-campus instruction: to offer students access to quality learning in a cost-efficient and effective manner. But class size in distance learning is not necessarily larger or smaller than traditional classrooms. We are pursuing distance learning with the same attention to cost efficiency and quality as we do with any method of delivering instruction. Certainly we hope that cost benefits will ultimately be realized. But this is not an automatic result. Indeed, at least in the short term, the proper development and implementation of distance learning is likely to require the infusion of significant additional resources.

(OSC) 3. Encourage campuses to adopt faculty courseload requirements and class size standards as part of formal campus planning to achieve desired efficiencies.

(SU) 3. The University accepts the underlying thrust of this recommendation and further notes that it has already moved to implement this guidance. In 1991, in response to a recommendation in State Comptroller's report 90-S-89, the University asked all State-operated campuses to develop a policy on teaching workload. All of our institutions complied with this request, and these campus-specific policies remain in effect. As the report correctly notes, thoughtful and enforceable policies need not require uniformity across campuses or academic units. We recognize, however, that this is an area that deserves continuing attention and we will review current policies on an ongoing basis.

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